



Stephanie Rawlings-Blake
Mayor

PLANNING COMMISSION

Wilbur E. "Bill" Cunningham, Chairman

STAFF REPORT



Thomas J. Stosur
Director

November 4, 2010

REQUEST: Street Closings/Multiple Streets and Alleys in Blocks 1588 and 1589 – For a New EBDI Community School

For the purpose of closing the 900 blocks of North Duncan, North Collington, and North Madeira Streets, the 2100 block and a portion of the 2200 block of East Eager Street, plus multiple alleys in blocks 1588 and 1589 for site assembly of a location slated for new school construction.

RECOMMENDATION: Approval, subject to the following condition: North Collington Street should be designated as an easement area in which no construction may occur and to remain open to pedestrian and bicycle traffic.

STAFF: Natasha Becker

PETITIONER: East Baltimore Development, Inc. (EBDI)

OWNER: Mayor and City Council of Baltimore

SITE/GENERAL AREA

Site Conditions: The requested street closings are situated within the area bounded by East Eager Street to the north, Ashland Avenue to the south, an alley at the rear of North Patterson Park Avenue to the east, and North Chester Street to the west. The adjacent parcels contain vacant and boarded up row homes, which have been acquired by the City's Department of Housing and Community Development for redevelopment purposes.

General Area: The future site of the East Baltimore Community School is a roughly seven acre site that lies just east of the New East Baltimore Community Planned Unit Development (PUD) and at the convergence of several distinct neighborhoods that are also Urban Renewal Areas in the central portion of East Baltimore. Those are the Middle East, Johnston Square, Broadway East, Oliver, and Gay Street I Urban Renewal Areas. Though predominantly Residential (either R-7 or R-8), there are also smaller areas of Office-Residential, Commercial, and Industrial zoning.

HISTORY

There have been no previous Planning Commission actions relating to the subject site.

CONFORMITY TO PLANS

The requested street closings conform to the Baltimore City Comprehensive Master Plan, specifically: LEARN Goal 1, Objective 2: Enhance schools and libraries as neighborhood assets and LEARN Goal 4, Objective 1: Improve pedestrian and bicycle access to schools and libraries.

ANALYSIS

East Baltimore Development, Inc. (EBDI) has requested street closings for all the streets and alleys within Blocks 1588 and 1589. This corresponds to the area bounded by East Eager Street to the north, Ashland Avenue to the south, an alley at the rear of North Patterson Park Avenue to the east, and North Chester Street to the west. This area has been identified as the site of the new East Baltimore Community School, and the purpose of the request is to facilitate site assembly. The streets and alleys, once closed, will be consolidated with adjacent parcels, which are all currently vacant and owned by the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore.

The East Baltimore Community School has been open since September 2009 at a temporary location at Washington and Chase Street. The school, operating out of modular trailers, is currently open for students in grades K, 1 and 5. It is technically a public “contract” school that can save 70% of its slots for pupils whose families lived within the EBDI borders – even those families who have decided not to move back.

EBDI is proceeding with plans to construct the permanent facility, which will allow expansion of their program to grades pre-K to 8. The facility will be co-branded with Johns Hopkins University and will feature many ancillary community services, including a professional development center, family support center, health clinic, after school program, and fitness center. A design competition is currently underway to select the firm that will design the new school. EBDI has funding in place for site demolition and design work, and it is expected that the new facility could open by fall 2013.

It should be noted that surveying revealed the presence of substantial and immovable utility lines within the bed of Collington Avenue, so this area will have to be designated as an easement area with a “no build” requirement. Additionally, Collington Avenue is designated as a major north-south route in the City’s Bicycle Master Plan. As such, the easement must also specify that the area will remain open to pedestrian and bicycle traffic.

Staff’s finding is that the various streets and alleys are no longer needed for public purposes and can be closed; the right-of-ways declared surplus property and sold.

The following groups have been notified of the street closing request: Baltimore City Council, EBDI, Forest City-New East Baltimore Partnership, DHCD, BCPS, Northeast Market Merchants Association, Reclaiming Our Community, Citizens Communication Coalition, Broadway Development Foundation, Madison East End Neighborhood Improvement Association, Monument Street Merchants Association, Monument Street Renaissance, Milton-Montford Improvement Association, Faith Lane Community Association, Washington-Wolfe

Gateway Community Association, McElderry Park Community Association, C.A.R.E., Save Middle East Action Committee, and Historic East Baltimore Community Action Coalition.

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